



World number one Victoria Azarenka of Belarus poses with the trophy after beating Samantha Stosur of Australia in the Qatar Open final in Doha on Sunday.

Fed's fourth on the trot

AFP, Rotterdam

Top seed Roger Federer won a fourth successive indoor title, and his 71st career crown, when he hammered Argentine Juan Martin del Potro 6-1, 6-4 to win his second Rotterdam Open on Sunday.

Federer had ended 2011 with a hat-trick of trophies in Basel, Paris and London before picking up this week where he left off in the Dutch city seven years ago where he won his first Rotterdam event.

"Even if I had a good indoor season last year, this is a great start. It was tough to come back and play Davis Cup and here, but I did it," he said.

"I also managed to stay positive after the Davis Cup loss, which was important for me. This court feels like home to me," added the 30-year-old, who was part of the Swiss team defeated 5-0 by the United States last weekend.

The victory took Federer's record against del Potro to 9-2, with the Swiss winning three of four in the series after losing the 2009 US Open final to the South American.

Federer, a 16-time Grand Slam winner, has now assured himself of a 12th consecutive year in which he has won at least one ATP title.

"It's incredible that it took me seven years to come back and defend my title, I hope the next time is not so long. But if it is, then it means I'll be playing for another seven years," joked Federer, who saved all seven break points he faced in a reassuring 88-minute victory.

Federer stormed into a 5-0 lead, with del Potro finally troubling his Swiss rival after 28 minutes when he rallied for 1-5.

But Federer maintained his red-hot form to sweep the set in 33 minutes.

Del Potro's resistance stiffened in the second, with Federer saving break points in the fourth, sixth and eighth games.

"I just tried to stay in the point and not make mistakes. I kept this mindset throughout the match and it really helped," said Federer. "I may have won the first set easy, but of course I knew that the second would not be as easy. I had to fight but I fought well. I tried to move forward against him and change the angle, the rhythm and the speed of the shot."

India's vital

Parthiv Patel would get his first game as a wicketkeeper in the side, but Indians would still have to make a choice about the batsman to leave out.

They would surely recall Ravichandran Ashwin who has bagged all his five wickets in the triangular series against the Lankans for impressive figures of three for 32 and two for 30.

Azarenka on a roll

AFP, Doha

Victoria Azarenka extended her domination over Samantha Stosur to win her third successive title of the year at the WTA Qatar Open on Sunday, taking her 2012 record to 17 straight wins.

The Belarusian world number one showed no signs of discomfort from her overnight injury scare in the semifinals against Agnieszka Radwanska by beating a listless Stosur, the US Open champion, 6-1, 6-2 in a one-sided final.

The Qatar Open was Azarenka's 11th title, 10 of them coming on hard courts, as she maintained her perfect record against the Australian who she has beaten in five career clashes beginning in 2008, with none of the matches going to three sets.

Sunday's win also completed a remarkable 12 months for Azarenka who lost to Daniela Hantuchova in the first round in Doha in 2011, a defeat that led her to contemplate retirement before being talked out of it by her mother and grandmother.

"I am really proud of the way I played today," said Azarenka, fighting back tears.

"I was not 100 per cent after my fall yesterday and I knew I had to adjust my game and everything went according to plan."

Stosur, who was playing her first final of the year, was bidding for her fourth title, but Azarenka was too good for the world number

five despite rarely hitting top gear.

The Australian Open champion broke Stosur in the third game of the first set from 40-all when the Aussie hit a ball long and then netted an easy volley.

Stosur again made crucial unforced errors in her next service game, putting a forehand into the net and then missing an easy smash before a powerful forehand return fetched Azarenka her second break.

The Belarusian then retained her serve to lead 5-1 and, following another error-ridden service game by Stosur, clinched the set with a fine volley.

The second set was also played along the same pattern as Stosur failed to reduce her errors and soon Azarenka had taken a stranglehold on the match by racing to a 3-0 lead.

And although the Australian managed to win two service games, Azarenka then broke her again in the eighth game to maintain a hundred per cent record in finals this year.

"Last year I lost in the first round and watched someone else lift this beautiful trophy," Azarenka said. "But now I have this for myself."

Stosur was happy after making her first final of the year.

"It's been great to be able to turn around my form so quickly after a disappointing month first up, so I'm really pleased that I have been able to pick it up and make it to the final," she said.

"As far as tonight goes, I think she played very well, very solid, as usual."

Sachin best batter again

AFP, New Delhi

Iconic Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar has bagged the fifth ESPNcricinfo best batting performance award in Tests beating the likes of his compatriot Rahul Dravid and Australian skipper Michael Clarke.

Tendulkar, whose 146 in Cape Town in 2011 came in testing conditions and in the face of some sublime swing bowling by Dale Steyn, became the No. 1 choice of seven jurors out of the 11 who had him in their top three.

The Test batting category had the widest gap between the winner and number two position -- six points separated Tendulkar's innings from Michael Clarke's 151, also scored in Cape Town in the Test in which Australia dismissed South Africa for 96 and were then bowled out in their second innings for 47.

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LOCAL SNIPPETS

FROM PAGE 16

emergency committee meeting at the BFF House yesterday. The meeting also approved the amendments of both district and divisional football associations' constitutions and decided to send it to all DFAs, said a press release yesterday. Meanwhile, the tenure of the existing BFF executive committee led by Kazi Salahuddin will expire on April 29.

Ganga-Padma volleyball Bangladesh volleyball team suffered a 1-3 defeat to Indian Railway in the Ganga-Padma Games Festival in Murshidabad, India yesterday.

Bangladesh Boys defeated PWD Sporting Club 1-0 with Mozahidur Rahman separating both sides seven minutes into the second half.

Karwanbazar PS beat Dipali Jubo Sangha 1-0 with Biplob scoring the decisive goal in the 75th minute.

Pallima badminton Wahidul, Goutam and Kabir moved to the next round of the singles event of Pallima Sanganbad Badminton Tournament beating their respective rivals at the club premises yesterday. Wahidul beat Liton 21-10, 21-18; Goutam beat Sirajul 13-11.

Bangladesh had earlier defeated BSF and Nodia District by identical 3-0 margins in their first two games. Bangladesh sent a youthful national side to give them international

exposure.

Div-II football

Bangladesh Boys club and Karwanbazar Progati Sangha won their respective matches of the Destiny Group Second Division Football League at the Shaheed Bishreshtha Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

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SCORES IN BRIEF

KHULNA: 137 for 6 in 20 overs (Gibbs 20, Smith 17, Shakib 14, Nasir 42, Russell 16 not out; Cooper 2-24, Enamul 3-22)

CHITTAGONG: 93 all out in 18.1 overs (Roy 30, Riyad 12, Arafat 12 not out; Marshal Ayub 4-20, Smith 2-14, Razzak 2-13)

Result: Khulna Royal Bengal won by 44 runs.

Man-of-the-match: Nasir Hossain.

Khulna

FROM PAGE 16

the exception of Jason Roy, who fell to a run-out after making a 24-ball 30 with two fours and as many sixes.

Earlier, the Chittagong bowlers continued their impressive form to restrict Khulna to 137 runs.

Khulna could manage a decent total thanks to Nasir Hossain, the highest-paid player in the BPL auction, who made team highest 42 off 38 balls that contained four boundaries and a six.

Left-arm spinner Enamul Haque was the most successful Chittagong bowler with three wickets for 22 runs.

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End of Ricky in ODIs?

Cricket

APP, Sydney

World Cup winner Ricky Ponting's one-day international career appeared over Monday after he was dropped from Australia's team after a dismal run of form, and was considering his future in the game.

Chief selector John Inverarity announced the axing of Ponting, the second all-time leading run-scorer in ODIs, after he scored just 18 runs in five tri-series knockouts against India and Sri Lanka.

"Ricky Ponting has been dropped from the [ODI] squad due to his lack of form in the five tri-series matches to date," Inverarity said.

Briefing reporters in Perth, Inverarity also said there were no guarantees Ponting would continue playing Test cricket, and that the former captain was pondering his next steps.

"Ricky is going to consider his future over the next couple of days and he'll talk it over with his family and with his manager, and my guess is he'll be giving a press conference in the next two or three days," he said.

Ponting was expected to hold a press conference to outline his future in Sydney on Tuesday, according to sources at Cricket Australia.

Ponting, 37, said earlier that he wanted to battle through his current

slump. He has averaged just 3.60 in his five tri-series innings.

But Inverarity, while praising Ponting's contribution over a glittering 17-year ODI career, seemed to shut the door on any future for the veteran in Australia's one-day side.

"The team will not seem the same without him, but moving on from the omission of players who have been outstanding over a long period of time is the nature of elite sport," he said.

"He made a double century in his last Test match and we are hoping that he remains available for Test match cricket, but there can be no guarantees in elite sport and in the Australian cricket team."

Inverarity added: "If he drops out of the ODI team then there's a possible lack of momentum there."

"There are three Test matches in the West Indies [in April], then as I understand it there are no more Test matches until October or November."

The selectors dumped Ponting as they announced a 13-man squad with all-rounder Shane Watson returning for Australia's next two tri-series ODIs, against Sri Lanka in Hobart on Friday and India in Sydney next Sunday.

Ponting's sacking came a day after he led Australia to a crushing 110-run win over India in Brisbane as stand-in for injured skipper Michael Clarke. But while the other batsmen made merry, he scored just seven runs from 26 balls.

Watson back for Australia

APP, Sydney

Shane Watson was named in the Australia squad for the first time this season as selectors Monday made a big call and dropped former skipper Ricky Ponting for the tri-series with India and Sri Lanka.

Watson replaced Ponting in a 13-man squad after the ex-captain's lean run of form with just 18 runs in five knockouts in the ODI series.

Selectors also recalled paceman Ryan Harris for Mitchell Starc and confirmed that Matthew Wade was their preferred wicketkeeper in the one-day form of the game to Test custodian Brad Haddin.

All-rounder Watson has not played for Australia this season since injuring a hamstring on the tour to South Africa late last year.

"Shane Watson is an all-rounder of proven class and the selection panel is keen to have him re-join the squad," chief selector John Inverarity said on Monday.

Inverarity said that Ponting had been axed due to his lack of form in the tri-series.

"The team will not seem the same without him, but moving on from the omission of players who have been outstanding over a long period of time is the nature of elite sport," he said.

SQUAD

Michael Clarke (captain), Shane Watson (vice-captain), Dan Christian, Xavier Doherty, Peter Forrest, Ryan Harris, Ben Hilfenhaus, David Hussey, Michael Hussey, Brett Lee, Clint McKay, Matthew Wade, David Warner.

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 Level in a hierarchy 5 Lower limb 8 Tranquil 12 Burn soother 13 Hockey surface 14 Hodge-podge 15 Road on a cliff's face 17 Nevada city 18 Greek vowel 19 Carnival venue 20 Beginning 21 Private place to sleep? 22 Compete 23 Cookwear? 24 Guys 30 Back 31 Chicken — 32 Concept 33 Current generator for some engines 35 Confuse 36 A Gabor 37 Ph. bk. data 38 Wooden box 41 Ultra-modernist 42 Periodical, for short 45 Stereo setup 46 City in Ontario 48 "Oh, woel!" 49 Pt. of speech 50 Therefore 51 Impudent 52 Spelling contest 53 Physical

DOWN 1 Compete on a track 2 Greatly in a race 3 Mrs. Nick Charles 4 Documentary filmmaker Burns 5 Within the law 6 Reverberate 7 "Golly!" 8 Roddy McDowell's "Planet of the Apes" role 9 Brewery products 10 Queue 11 Academic 16 Press 20 Lubricate 21 Musician 22 Irritate 23 Upper limb 24 Shell game item 25 Tatter 26 Egg — yung 27 Peculiar 28 Become one 29 Utter 31 Sch. org. 34 Previous night 35 Apollo's landing site 37 Chutzpah 38 Bloke 39 Anger 40 Some-where out there 41 Protuberance 42 Fraternal surname of comedy 43 Plankton component 44 Snatch, with "onto" 45 Tax 46 Snatch, with "onto" 47 Teeny

Solution time: 21 mins.

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